

Message Text

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CINCPAC

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SUBJECT: NEW YEAR'S RECEPTION FOR DIPLOMATIC CORPS

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

1. FOLLOWING THE TRADITIONAL PRACTICE OF THE MONARCHY, THE NEW COMMUNIST LEADERS OF LAOS HELD A NEW YEAR'S RECEPTION FOR THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS AT THE PRESIDENTIAL PALACE, FORMERLY THE RESIDENCE ROYALE. THEY SHOWED SOME CONSIDERATION BY SCHEDULING IT MORNING OF DEC 31.

2. FORMAT WAS QUITE SIMILAR TO THAT OF DECEMBER 5 EVENING RECEPTION CELEBRATING ESTABLISHMENT OF PDRL. PRESIDENT SOUPHANOUVONG STOOD FACING ASSEMBLED SENIOR MEMBERS OF CORPS WITH PRIME MINISTER KAYSONE ON HIS RIGHT AND "ADVISOR TO THE GOVERNMENT" SOUVANNA PHOUMA BEHIND THEM WERE SOME BUT NOT ALL OF THE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTERS AND DEPUTY CHAIRMAN OF THE SUPREME PEOPLE'S ASSEMBLY. THE ONLY OTHER LAO PRESENT WERE SELECTED FOREIGN MINISTRY STAFF MEMBERS.

3. AS ON DECEMBER 5, DEAN OF THE CORPS LE VAN HIEN (DRV AMBASSADOR) READ GREETINGS IN VIETNAMESE, WITH CONSECUTIVE

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TIVE INTERPRETATION IN LAO. (HE HAD CIRCULATED HIS RE-

MARKS TO THE CORPS IN ADVANCE; THEY WERE EFFUSIVE TOWARD THE LAO REVOLUTIONARY STRUGGLE BUT UNEXCEPTIONABLE FROM OUR STANDPOINT.) SOUPHANOUVONG REPLIED IN LAO FROM AN EVEN SHORTER TEXT. MIEMOGRAPHED FRENCH TRANSLATIONS OF BOTH MEN'S REMARKS WERE CIRCULATED TO THOSE IN ATTENDANCE.

4. ONCE SPEECHES WERE OUT OF THE WAY, CHAMPAGNE FLOWED FOR NEARLY AN HOUR. FOREIGN MINISTRY CHEF DE CABINET SOUBANH SRITHIRATH PASSED COOKIES ON A SILVER TRAY.

5. PRESIDENT, PRIME MINISTER AND OTHER OFFICIALS WITH WHOM I SPOKE GREETED ME CORDIALLY. FOREIGN MINISTER PHOUNE SIPRASEUTH WAS FRIENDLY AS USUAL AND SAID HE WOULD BE SURE TO SCHEDULE MY FORMAL COURTESY CALL ON HIM SOON, BEFORE MY DEPARTURE FOR EA CHIEFS OF MISSION CONFERENCE. WHEN I JOINED SOUVANNA PHOUMA IN A SMALL GROUP, HE WAS EXPOUNDING ON POTENTIAL MINERAL WEALTH OF LAOS, WHICH HE SAID MIGHT INCLUDE PETROLEUM (SIC). HE APPEARED TO HAVE LOST WEIGHT EVEN SINCE I LAST SAW HIM ON DECEMBER 5.

6. THE PROGRAM FOR THE MORNING'S EVENT REFERRED SOMEWHAT CONFUSINGLY TO THE ARRIVAL OF UNSPECIFIED "GUESTS OF HONOR," LEADING US TO SPECULATE THAT MEDALS MIGHT BE HANDED OUT TO THE FIRST STAKHANOVITES OF THE NEW LAOS. HOWEVER, A PROTOCOL OFFICER TOLD PAO THAT THE TERM WAS INTENDED TO APPLY TO SOUVANNA, EVEN THOUGH HE WAS LISTED LOWER ON THE PAGE BY HIS NEW TITLE.

7. THAI DECISION TO REOPEN THE FRONTIER, CONFIRMED BY RANKING LAO OFFICIALS AND THAI DIPLOMATS IN ATTENDANCE (SEPTEL), UNDOUBTEDLY CONTRIBUTED MUCH TO THE CORDIALITY OF THE AFFAIR.
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